

REMARKS

The Applicants have carefully considered the Official Action mailed February 18, 2009, and in view of the arguments presented by the Examiner, the Claims have been substantially amended. As a result of these amendments, the Applicants believe that all of the objections raised by the Examiner have been overcome and amended Claims 1 and 3-17 are all in condition for allowance.

Claim 1, as originally presented, has been rejected based upon the fully automated disinfection system taught in Ott. However, a review of this prior art reference reveals that the disinfection system disclosed in Ott is specifically directed to a cleaning system for endoscopes. As a result, due to the well known construction and configuration of endoscopes, the cleaning system disclosed Ott incorporates a circular or cylindrically shaped container 30 into which the elongated length of endoscope 10 is positioned. As fully detailed in column 4, lines 15-23 of Ott, insertion portion 16 of endoscope 10 is placed in container 30 and becomes coiled against the cylindrical sides thereof, thereby permitting both longer and shorter length endoscopes to be completely contained in container 30 of insertion tank 28.

As is fully evident from the disclosure found in Ott, the elongated length of endoscope 10 is only capable of being cleaned by being inserted into and coiled about the side walls of cylindrically shaped container 30. However, as fully detailed in the disclosure of the present invention, as well as in the arguments presented below, the

coiled construction taught by Ott is incapable of being employed for use in the fully automated disinfection system of the present invention.

In accordance with the present invention, a fully automated disinfection system for transesophageal ultrasonic probes is provided. In this regard, due to the construction of the transesophageal ultrasonic probes and the sensitive electronic components contained therein, the ultrasonic probes must be carefully handled throughout the entire cleaning process. In particular, contact between the probe and the side walls of the receiving zone must be prevented in order to eliminate any potential damage from occurring to the probe. As a result of this requirement, the teaching provided in Ott is completely inapplicable, since Ott specifically teaches a cylindrically shaped container 30 into which the scope to be cleaned must be coiled against the cylindrical sides thereof.

As fully detailed in the disclosure of the present invention and defined in amended Claim 1, the present cleaning system incorporates a continuous, elongated receiving cavity/passageway which comprises a first substantially straight section, a second substantially straight section, and an intermediate, arcuately curved section which interconnects the first substantially straight section with the second substantially straight section. In this way, elongated shaft 24 of the ultrasonic probe assembly 22, along with the transducer 25, which is mounted at the terminating end of shaft 24, is able to be inserted into the probe receiving cavity/passageway and advanced to be

completely retained therein without experiencing any potential damage or harm to shaft 24 or transducer 25.

As detailed in the disclosure of the present invention, the construction detailed above for probe receiving cavity/passageway is of particular importance in assuring that transesophageal ultrasonic probe assembly 22 with shaft 24 and transducer 25 is capable of being received and retained in disinfection system 20 with complete assurance that no damage will occur. Furthermore, once positioned in probe receiving cavity/passageway, transesophageal ultrasonic probe assembly 22 is capable of being completely cleaned in a safe, efficient, and fully automated manner.

Applicants have clearly and unequivocally distinguished Claim 1 from the prior art references upon which the Examiner has relied. In particular, Claim 1 has been amended to clearly define and precisely detail the disinfection system of the present invention, along with the specific construction of the elongated passageway as detailed above.

Furthermore, Claim 1 has been amended to incorporate all of the limitations previously found in a dependent Claim 2, further defining the elongated passageway as comprising a continuous, smooth, elongated pathway having a proximal end and a distal end, with the distal end representing the lowest point of the elongated passageway. This construction is also detailed in the disclosure of the present invention as an important feature of the present invention, for assuring complete cleaning and disinfection of the transesophageal ultrasonic probe assembly.

In view of these amendments, the Applicants believes that Claim 1, as now presented, clearly and unequivocally distinguishes the prior art references upon which the Examiner has relied and places Claim 1 in condition for allowance. As a result, the Applicants believe that Claim 1 should be found to be in condition for allowance.

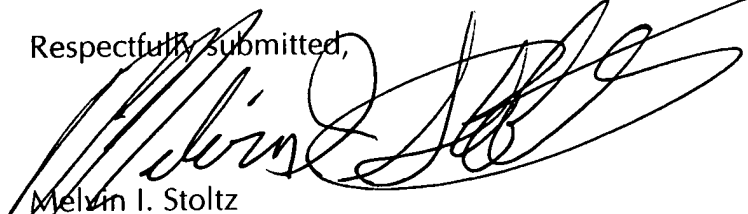
Claim 2 has been canceled, since the features originally defined therein have been incorporated into Claim 1, along with further unique distinguishing structural features. In addition, Claims 3-17 have been retained as dependent claims of Claim 1 which add novel combinations to Claim 1. For this reason, as well as the reasons detailed above in reference to Claim 1, the Applicants believe that these dependent claims are also in condition for allowance. Furthermore, with regard to the Examiner's citation of Coles and/or Sanford in combination with Ott in rejecting dependent Claims 10-17, the Applicant believes that the amendment to Claim 1 clearly distinguishes these secondary references and the combination of features defined in these dependent claims are in condition for allowance.

Finally, Claim 4 has been amended to positively recite the incorporation of a disinfection solution. In view of this amendment, Applicant believes the Examiner's objection has been rendered moot.

Based upon the foregoing amendment and the arguments presented herein, the Applicants believe that Claims 1 and 3-17 are all in condition for allowance and an early Notice of Allowability is earnestly solicited. If any questions remain which may be resolved in a telephone interview, Applicants' undersigned Attorney would gladly

discuss such questions with the Examiner at the Examiner's convenience. For this purpose, Applicants' undersigned Attorney has provided his telephone number below.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Melvin I. Stoltz", written over a horizontal line.

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